

781st

TANK BATTALION

UP FROM MARSEILLE

8781 TB

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Up

from

MARSEILLE

781st

tank battalion



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WE PAY TRIBUTE

JAMES BARRICKMAN, 2nd Lt.	Company A
JAMES D. MITCHELL, T/5	Headquarters Company
JOHN A. ANDERSON, T/4	Company A
VINTON G. BLANCHARD, Cpl.	Company A
EDWARD BRANNIGAN, Sgt.	Company A
ARMAND R. FANA, Cpl.	Company A
ROBERT F. KELLY, S/Sgt.	Company A
FREDERICK W. LOWELL, T/4	Company A
HARRY McBRIDE, Pfc.	Company A
LOUIE O. PARRISH, T/5	Company A
HERSCHEL L. ROGERS, T/4	Company A
MAX C. RUPLE, Cpl.	Company A
FREDERICK SENSEL, Pfc.	Company A
JAMES SIRGINNIS, Pfc.	Company A
JOHN D. SANDRONI, 2nd Lt.	Company B
ROSENDO C. GARCIA, Pfc.	Company B
CLARENCE E. KELLY, Pvt.	Company B
ELI B. RAWLINS, Pvt.	Company B
JOSEPH F. WECFINSKI, Cpl.	Company B
ROBERT H. KENNEDY, Cpl.	Company B
LYNWOOD F. SPENCER, Sgt.	Company B
WILLIAM C. GOODMAN, Pvt.	Company B
STANLEY J. GORISEK, Sgt.	Company C
HENRY W. ROBERGE, Sgt.	Company C
FREDERICK G. WILLIAMS, S/Sgt.	Company D
PATRICK T. PERRY, Sgt.	Company D
ERNEST G. CLEMENS, T/4	Company D
MORRIS K. BROWN, Cpl.	Company D
STEVEN STRUTINSKI, JR., Pfc.	Company D
RAYMOND C. McGAUGHEY, Pfc.	Company D
JOHN B. JENNINGS, Pvt.	Company D
RICHARD T. VAN WINKLE, Pvt.	Company D

A MESSAGE FROM THE C. O.

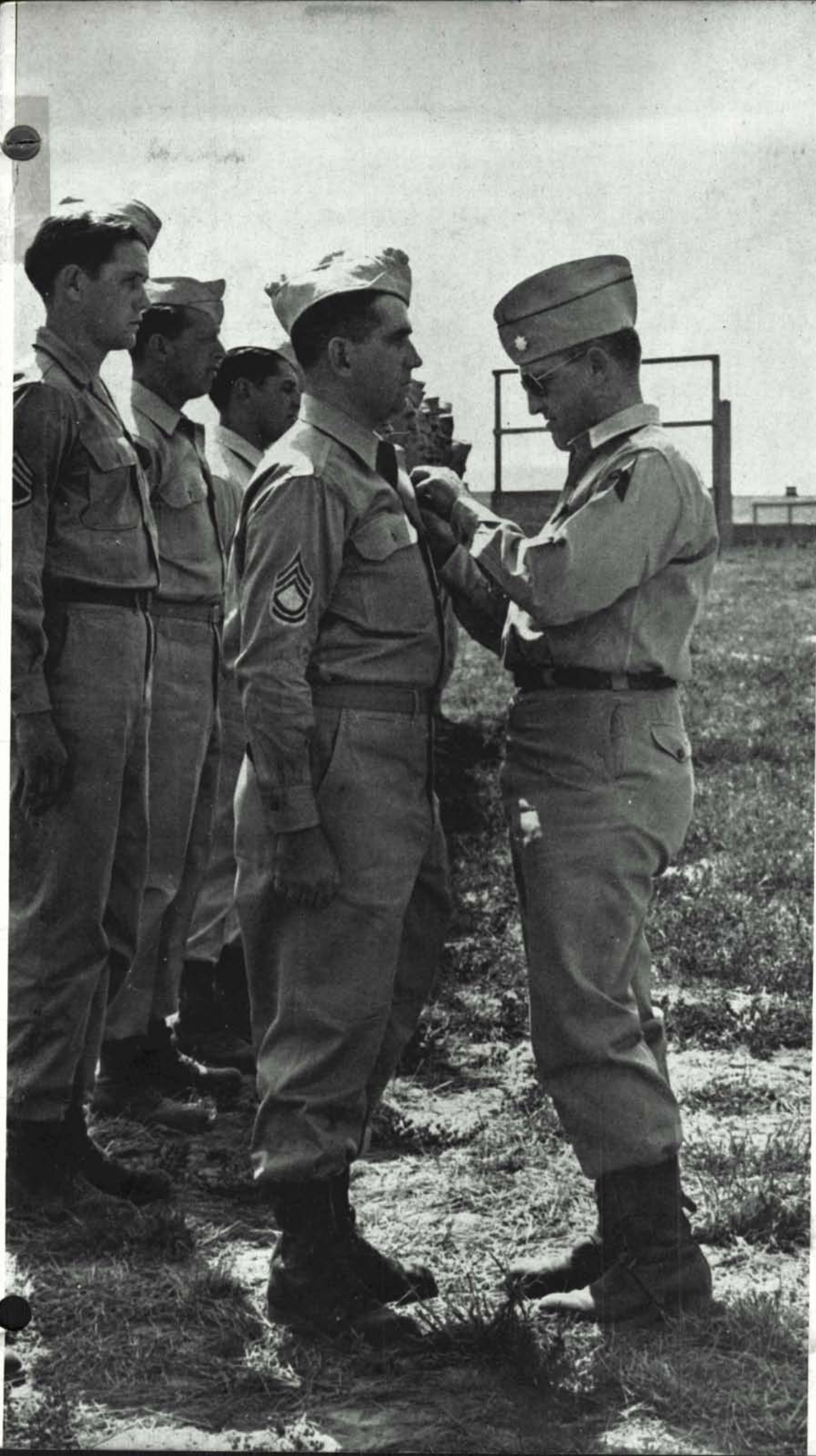
At the time this record of the 781st Tank Battalion goes to press, I still have no indication as to whether or not it will be officially deactivated. Certainly it is clear to all of us that the eagerly awaited discharge of the "old timers" both officer and enlisted, will so change the unit that it can truly be said the outfit as we have all known it for so long, will soon cease to exist.

As I look back on the period of the life of the battalion, a period lacking but a very short time of being three full years, it is with a feeling of intense pride. Very few commanders have had the good fortune to activate, train, fight, and, I hope, deactivate his unit. While I find a number of situations in my memory that might have been modified if they were to be done again, I am confident every one of us realizes that the distinction the battalion has earned has resulted from the sincerity of purpose of every last member of the organization. Mistakes, if made, were honest mistakes and were not repeated. That is important. This inherent sincerity of purpose has made the 781st a unit of which we can all be justifiably proud.

I want to take this last opportunity to thank every member of the command for his part in making our record possible. I only wish I could thank each one of you personally. No single individual or group could have accomplished alone what we have done together. It is my fervent hope that we can all leave the 781st with a full measure of pleasant memories. I personally have made many friends I shall never forget. In the days to come I hope we will meet again as civilians enjoying the success you all so richly deserve. May God bless you.

Harry L. Kinne, Jr.







"GOAT HILL"

Up from Marseille

The 781st Tank Battalion was activated on January 2, 1943, the month that the tide finally turned against the Axis. It was the month of Russian victories at Stalingrad, of the first big Allied victories in North Africa. We started as a light tank battalion with Lt. Col. Harry L. Kinne, Jr. as C. O. Some of the officers, the cadre, had seen service with other armored outfits—the 742d and 191st Tank Battalions and the Sixth Tank Group—but most of them were Second Lieutenants fresh out of OCS. The men were mostly recruits. The enlisted cadre was made up of men from the 191st Tank Battalion, many of whom later became the battalion's ranking non-commissioned officers: 1st Sergeants Hall,

Delaney, Shepp, Mabes, and Rae; Sgts. Tate, Dunn, Wrenn, Devlin, Wilkie, Keiper, Fields, Elliott, Modon, and Shephard, the latter winning a battlefield commission in Alsace. The majority of the men who moved into the never-to-be-forgotten brick barracks opposite Theatre No. 1 at Fort Knox came from the Armored Replacement Training Center.

The battalion's time at Fort Knox was largely spent working for the Armored Force Board, for which it road tested tanks, vehicles, and various other types of equipment. Probably the most significant job was assisting in the development of the General Sherman M4A3 medium tank. The study of combat reports from North Africa convinced Armo-

red experts that the Army needed a better medium tank than the General Grant. Forty tanks were assembled at Knox to be tested by the Board. Ten had radial airplane engines, ten had diesel engines, ten had V-type Ford engines, and ten had five Chrysler automobile engines mounted as a single power unit. Day and night the 781st operated these tanks over the countryside around Fort Knox, carefully recording all performance data. The test was called the "Million Dollar Tank Test" as the tank that was found superior was to be backed up by U. S. mass production. When all the data was compiled, the tank found to be best suited to all field conditions was the General Sherman with the V-type

eight cylinder Ford engine. The correctness of this decision by the Board has time and again been proved at Cassino, the St. Lo break-through, and by the 781st itself in the assault on the Maginot and Siegfried Lines and, even more so, in the subsequent rat race through Germany and Austria.

The battalion's service with the Board ended officially when it was reorganized as a medium battalion and sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi November 2, 1943. At Shelby its training as a combat outfit was intensified, and it began to discover itself as a fighting team through work in the field on platoon, company, and battalion problems. There was much to be learned, but Shelby was not the



best place in the world to learn it. It was poor tank country. Only two good things could be said for Shelby: it was an ideal place to practice retrieving tanks from sand and mud, and it served as an excellent base for off-duty operations in Biloxi and New Orleans!

In April, 1944, it looked as if we were finally getting out of Shelby, but after the advanced detachment had reluctantly prepared things for us at Camp Rucker, Alabama, they were called back when orders were revoked, and on April 16 we at last won our movement argument and actually left for Fort Jackson, South Carolina. There the training that was started at Shelby was continued under much more favorable circumstances. If Shelby was grade school for the battalion, Jackson was high school and Camp Pickett, Virginia, was college. At Pickett the bat-

talion practiced combined training in the field with the 78th Infantry Division, running through problems that were to prove excellent preparation for the fighting it was later to do when attached to infantry divisions in France, Germany and Austria. Infantry was carried on tanks, the use and value of the 300 radio was learned and tank-infantry liason and coordination was developed.

During this time, "D" Company was at Camp Wainwright, Alberta, Canada. Using GI smoke generators, they worked with elements of the Royal Canadian Army on tank-infantry operations in smoke. Some of the techniques developed by "D" Company were used successfully by the British Second and Canadian First Armies when they crossed the Rhine.

When the battalion returned to Fort Jackson in August, overseas preparations were really intensified. Incidentally, while the men were actually boarding the second troop train (the first having left) to go to Camp Pickett, Col. Kinne received a secret letter from Washington alerting the battalion for overseas. It was an unusual procedure, to say the least, but not too much so for the 781st. Somehow things never did happen the easy way during training. POM work started at Pickett and continued at Jackson. IG inspections first from Army and later from War Department were passed, POM requirements

GETTING SET TO MOVE UP





SILVER STAR WINNERS

at last fulfilled, and officers and men straightened out their personal affairs and spent whatever time they could with their families.

With the air full of rumors about the Southwest Pacific, Norway, and England, on October 7 the battalion entrained for Camp Shanks, New York. Shanks will probably be best remembered as the camp thirty minutes from Broadway where no one got a pass! After we finished our processing, the battalion made arrangements for a special pass

train but it had to be cancelled when the ship alert was received about two hours before train time.

On Friday, the 13th of October, 1944, with hold numbers chalked on their helmets and their stomachs filled with Red Cross doughnuts and coffee, the officers and men of the 781st climbed the gangplank of the Navy transport U. S. S. La Jeunne and the next day sailed for Europe. The trip proved calm and uneventful. In the fourteen days



THANKSGIVING IN MARSEILLES

it took to reach France, Service Company's dog "Doc" ruined Army-Navy relations, S/Sgt. Albus lined his musette bag with beaucoup bucks and a large percentage of the command went around muttering, "Sweepers! Man your brooms, clean sweep fore and aft!"

After an eight mile march that was almost straight up and that made POM requirements seem like reception center calisthenics, the battalion reached its first overseas bivouac, a windy, muddy hill outside Marseille, that was to be known as Goat Hill, the Mud Flats, and several other names quite unprintable. Cargo was unloaded, tanks processed, peeps and trucks winterized and reconnaissance in

strength along the Rue Cannebiere was in order. In addition to the jobs all units have to do when they land in Europe, the 781st had yet another. One thousand boxes of its cargo failed to reach Marseille. (Shades of packing and crating care at Jackson, to say nothing of personal bed rolls.) Ships came in and were eagerly inspected but our cargo apparently was in Normandy, Naples, Southampton, or Timbuctu. It never did show up. When the job of complete re-supply was finally finished and Marseille had seen us one whole month, the battalion moved by truck convoy and French railroads northward toward the front. To Americans accustomed to

U. S. railroads, the rail trip was full of surprises. Engineers stopped the train to drop into a brasserie for a cognac or visit a friend along the way. But the French were probably no less surprised by tanks so massive that they fell through flat cars in the middle of tunnels and by marksmen who practiced from moving box cars with Tommy guns. Upon our arrival in Padoux, France, December 1st, we became part of the VI Corps of the Seventh Army. Padoux was as different from Marseille as Hattiesburg was from Columbia. But in spite of the manure piles in the front yards, and having to sleep in barns, the men liked the people of Padoux. A week later we left for the front and the 781st at last went into combat.

Upon arriving in Alsace, the companies were attached to the three regiments of the 100th Infantry Division—"A" Company to the 399th, "B" to the 398th and "C" to the 397th. "D" Company was later split up, a platoon to each regiment.

On the day the 781st troops moved into the line, December 7th, the Seventh Army entered Germany. To the north, the Ninth and First Armies were pushing through Metz toward the German frontier, and the Third was continuing to advance from the Moselle River to the border. The Seventh Army's job was to push through the Nazi-manned Maginot Line fortresses, break through the

Siegfried Line and head toward Mannheim.

When the 781st joined the fight, the 100th Division, temporarily stopped, was closing in on Bitche, one of the main fortress towns of the Maginot Line. The first platoon of Able Company was the first part of the 781st to see action when they supported the First Battalion of the 399th in the attack on Lemberg, a small town seven kilometers south of Bitche. Because of the high volume of fire from our tanks, and the close cooperation of the infantrymen, the attack was successful. For his aggressive leadership, Lt. William Kaiser received the Silver Star and most of his men the Bronze Star.

Two days later Lt. Donald Crane's Second

CHOP-CHOP



platoon of "A" Company attacked down the road north of Lemberg toward Bitche, knocking out three Nazi flak wagons, two 75 mm. field pieces and two howitzers. For his leadership in this action, Lt. Crane received the second Silver Star in the outfit and many more Bronze Stars were awarded his men. In four days, all of the other companies had seen action in and around Mouterhouse. The ice had been broken and the reputation the battalion ultimately enjoyed was well in the making.

By the middle of December, most of the men in the line companies had seen Bitche—the fortress in the city itself and the outlying Maginot forts surrounded by their tank traps

SOME HIGH PRICED HELP



made of railroad tracks sticking up in the ground like groves of saplings. Baker Company, augmented by the guns from the Assault Gun Platoon, supported the 398th in its attack on the forts west of Bitche. After some of the forts had been captured, a tank dozer crew from Headquarters Company piled dirt and rubble over them so that the Nazis would have a tough time getting back in. After finishing their job, the tank dozer crew found they couldn't get the tank out of the hole they had dug. It wasn't practical to retrieve it because of direct 88 fire, so they walked home.

Crews of two "D" Company tanks also hit the dirt after the same action, leaving their damaged tanks. Under German artillery fire, Lt. Cohen and his retriever crew brought the tanks back so they could be repaired and fight again.

When Bitche was finally taken in March, 1945, among the prisoners were some Nazi engineer troops who had been given the job of digging out the forts that had been worked over by Corporal Cote's tank dozer. It had been impossible to get back into several, the Nazis reported. For their work in the assault on Bitche, five members of this tank dozer crew, twenty-four members of "B" Company and two men each from "A" and "B" Companies received a Presidential Unit Citation along with the 398th Infantry Regiment.



WINGEN, FRANCE—AFTER RETAKING

In spite of the magnificent fighting around Bitche, and well-laid plans for the assault of the forts and the city, on December 21st the battalion was detached from the 100th Division and the next day withdrawn to the vicinity of Hatten, over near the Rhine, all because of a guy named Von Rundstedt. With almost complete surprise, he struck through the Forest of the Ardennes with a right hook aimed at Antwerp that would have cut off 38 Allied divisions. By the 19th of December, the 101st Airborne Division was surrounded in Bastogne by five Nazi divisions.

Seventh Army units were hurriedly shifted to the north to fill the foxholes of the Third Army Units that had moved north to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. The Seventh Army front was extended and weakened, and all plans for any large-scale offensive action were temporarily postponed.

At various times during the next month, the battalion supported five different divisions, including the famous "Battered Bastards of Bastogne," the 101st Airborne. While supporting the 79th Division, our men first drove their tanks on German soil. The Third pla-



SINGIN' SAM

toon of "C" Company had its CP in Rechtenback, Germany, near Wissembourg, on December 23, while the second platoon was in Schweighofen. The Seventh Army wasn't pushing and press communiques said, "All quite." There wasn't too much doing unless, of course, you ask Lts. Leber and Walsh and their two platoons how it feels to duck direct

THE DANUBE



88 fire every time you climb in or out of a tank. On January 3, the 79th Division withdrew from its precarious salient to a new main line of resistance roughly parallel to the Maginot forts. Charlie Company was the last Seventh Army unit to leave Germany in this area and provided vital protection for the slowly withdrawing infantry. As we withdrew, the people stood in groups on street corners and looked scared. French flags weren't hanging from the windows any more and no little kids waved. Moving back was a new and unwelcome experience.

Most of the combat time of the 781st was spent in what the Germans call Elsass and Lothringen and the French call Alsace and Lorraine. The French lost this territory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 but regained it in World War I. Hitler took it back in 1940 and did his best to Nazify and Germanize its people. He changed the names of all the towns from French to German. Le Petite Pierre (which means The Little Stone) was changed to Lutzelstein (which means the same in German), and more than one man drove through Lutzelstein with a French map looking for La Petite Pierre. Hitler fined the Alsatians five marks for wearing a beret or saying "Bonjour" instead of the approved "Guten Tag," and more than one tanker was billeted in a house that had the French tricolor sticking out the window, and a photo-

graph of a Nazi soldier standing on the mantel.

Some of the bitterest battles fought by the battalion—Wingen, Gambsheim, Sessenheim, Schillersdorf—were waged during the withdrawal and readjustment that followed Von Rundstedt's offensive. Realizing that the push in the north would make some retreating necessary in the Alsace region, the Nazis brought in crack SS troops rumored to be under Heinrich Himmler himself. One regiment of an SS Mountain division, by moving one at a time and at night, managed to bypass the front lines and occupy the town of Wingen eight miles north of La Petite Pierre. These SS men were the probing force. If they were successful, other Nazis waited in reserve to take advantage of their gains.

About dawn on January 4, the SS captured the First Battalion CP of the 276th Infantry, placing the prisoners under guard in the village church. The next day the third platoon of "B" Company, with the First Battalion, moved toward Wingen. Because the actual location of friendly infantry in some of the houses at the edge of town was unknown, our tanks were ordered to use only their machine guns. This was a set up for the SS men who promptly knocked out two tanks with bazookas, killing four men, injuring three and taking three prisoners. The road was blocked with our own disabled tanks and the platoon was



LOOKING OVER BITCHE

forced to withdraw. The next day we were allowed to use our 75s and 76s and part of the town was reoccupied. The second platoon poured a cross fire into the town from hills to the south and on the third day, January 6, the Krauts were driven out. The three 781st men who had been held prisoners in the church were liberated along with almost 100 doughs. As night began to fall, the tanks

MIGAWD, ITS AS BIG AS A HOUSE!



pulled out of their front line positions to be gassed up and to bivouac where they would be safe from fanatical SS bazooka teams. As soon as they heard the tanks rumble away, the SS staged a counter attack shouting and screaming as they again infiltrated the west end of town.

A coordinated tank-infantry attack the next day finally cleared Wingen of these SS, who again infiltrated our lines to the north, this time to *leave* the town in the same way they had entered it. Although we killed several hundred of them, we took only a handful of prisoners. Wingen was our most expensive town up till that time.

While "B" Company was fighting the Battle of Wingen and holding back the Nazis who had been emboldened by Von Rundstedt's offensive, "A" Company was 30 miles to the southwest along the Rhine just south of Strasbourg. The same day Wingen was

cleaned out, "A" Company's first and second platoons staged a hit-and-run raid on the little town of Gambenheim. With one infantry officer and six infantrymen to support them, the two platoons took 60 PWs and brought back to our lines 11 American doughs who had been holed up in a German pillbox for two days. Ten days later, the Nazis surrounded Sessenheim. "A" Company's second platoon, with a battalion of infantry, took the town only to be pushed out again the next day as Jerry moved back in.

The following morning at 0600, "A" Company's tanks were warmed up in the cold Alsatian dawn. There was a foot of snow on the ground and the air was misty. A carefully coordinated tank-infantry attack had been worked out at 0200 that morning. At a few minutes before 0700, tanks and infantry arrived together at the edge of Sessenheim as planned. It was still dark but, in spite of the mist and darkness, they could see the town. Several buildings in it had been set afire by the artillery.

A few minutes after 0700, they were a bare 400 yards from a group of buildings on the outskirts of the town. At that moment every tank radio carried Sgt. Sexton's voice saying in tense amazement, "My God, it's as big as a house!" "It" was one of four Mark VI German Tiger tanks, dug in and painted white, that had been brought into the town secretly

SERGEANT ABNEY



during the night. A moment after the sergeant spoke, 75 mm. shells from our tanks found their way to the Nazi tanks, but as Sgt. Johnson put it, "They bounced off like tennis balls." It wasn't long before shells from 88s, anti-tank and self-propelled guns were everywhere. T/5 Huya saw one shell hit to the right of Johnson's tank, then the left, then one left a trail of sparks as it scraped harmlessly along the belly of the tank. Eight tanks out of eight were hit in as many minutes. The attack on Sessenheim ended with eleven men killed or MIA, fifteen seriously wounded, and with six of our tanks left burning in the snow at the edge of town.

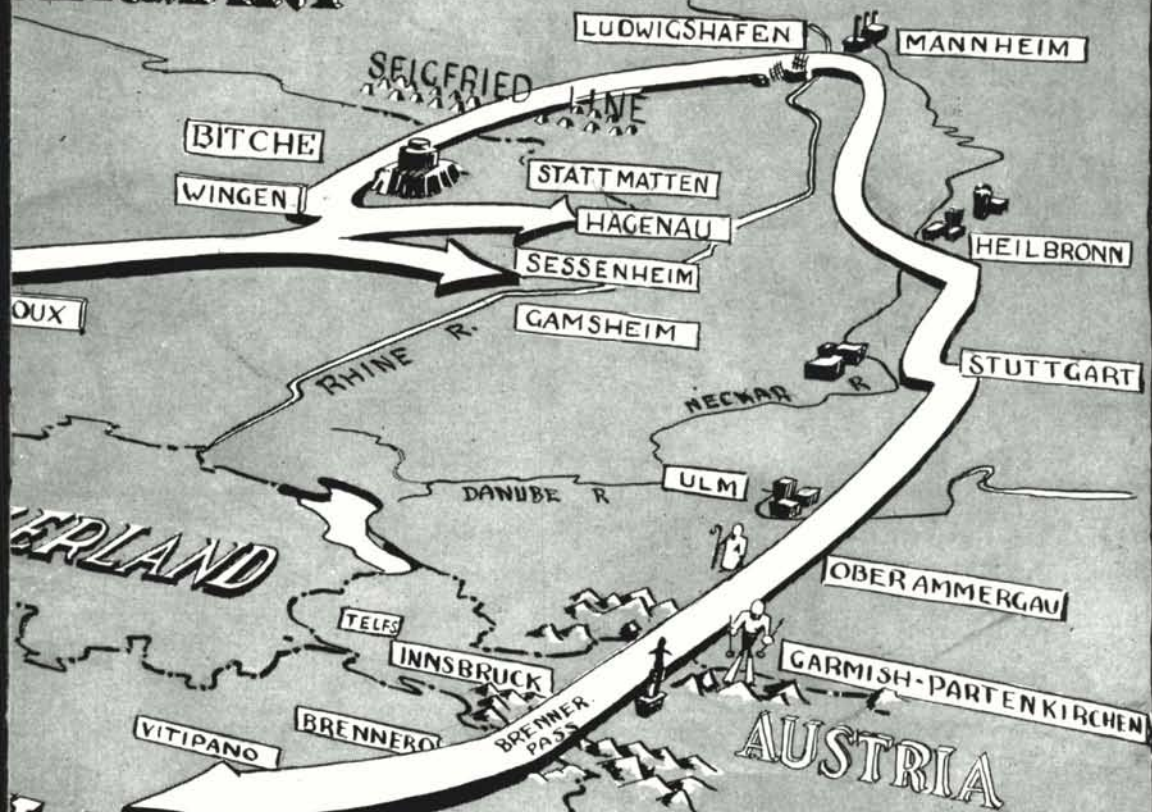
While "B" and "A" Companies were fighting at Wingen and Sessenheim, "C" Company's platoons were farmed out to infantry regiments that were holding defensive positions nearby. "D" Company was used in raiding parties, to augment reconnaissance units and as local security elements. In one raid "D" Company's second platoon, under Lt. Shartel, was told to go to a particular place on a map as indicated by the now famous "Big Finger" method. Unable to make preliminary reconnaissance, they were on their way when they passed hundreds of men in white camouflage suits digging in. They couldn't find troops at their destination and again passed the white-suited men on their way back. When they returned to our area for a second briefing, they suddenly realized

the men in white were Krauts. They immediately returned and, with one company of our infantry, killed over three hundred Nazis without loss of men or tanks. About the same time, Lt. Pais' first platoon, accompanied by less than a platoon of infantry cooks, clerks and KPs, was given the job of retaking Stattmatten, which had been first taken on the night of January 5th by an enemy battalion. Approaching the town quietly with their light tanks, they achieved complete surprise and captured the Kraut battalion commander and his staff. It was during this period of withdrawal and setting up of defensive positions that the six tanks in the battalion having 105 mm. howitzers were used to such good advantage in a separate provisional unit called "Y" Battery, so named after its leader, Lt. Yonkers. It was made up largely of Headquarters Company men from the

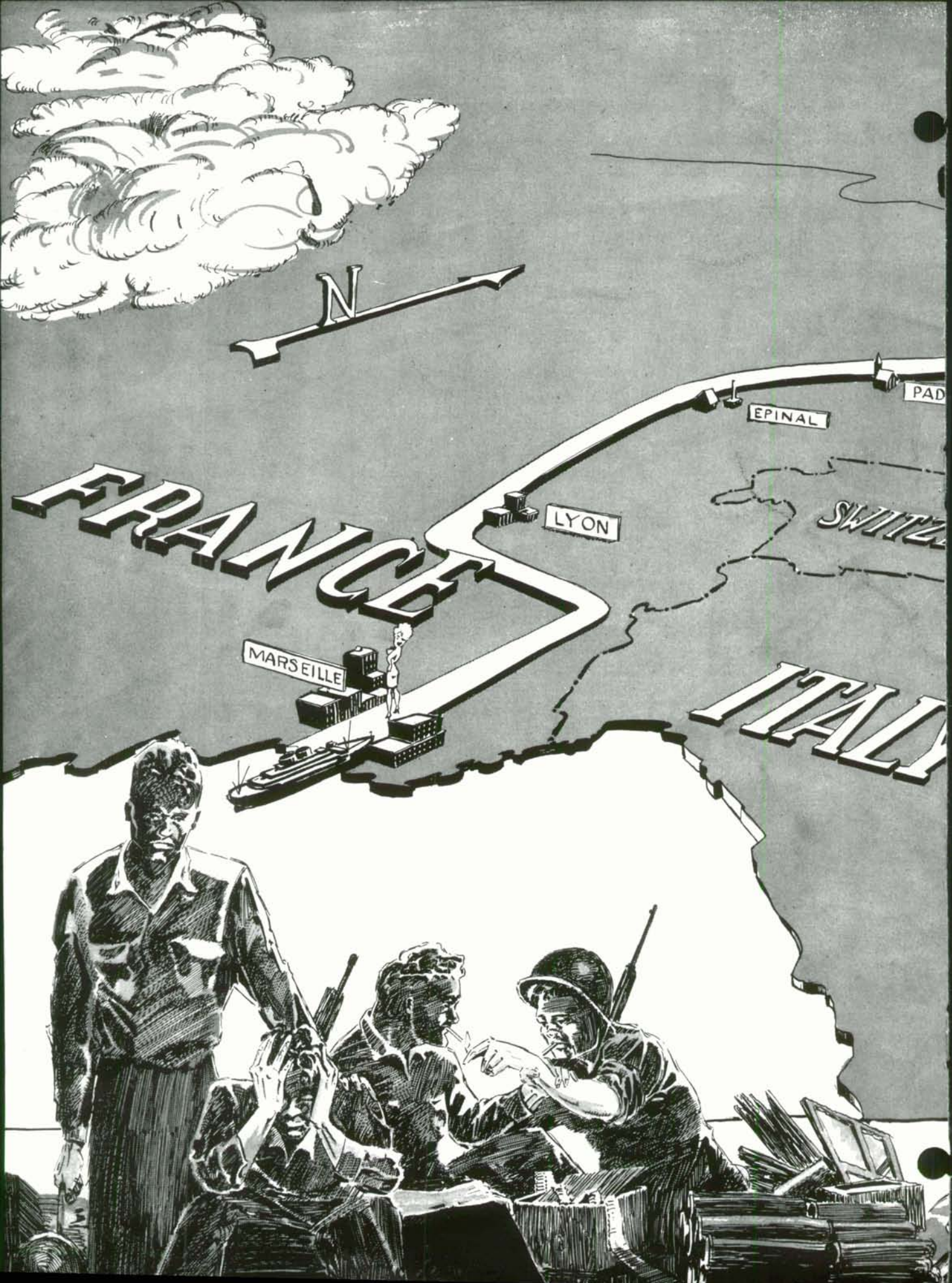
THE COLONEL'S (CENSORED) TRAILER



GERMANY



Stoppall '45





SIMANSKY!!

Assault and Mortar Platoons. Much of their work was in indirect fire, as learned at Fort Jackson, but fortunately much more accurate.

By the middle of January all of the ground won by the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge had been won back. The Germans had thrown into this desperate gamble their last mobile troop reserves and a large part of their remaining new equipment. In thousands of battles, large and small, from Liege to Lemberg, from Bitche to Bastogne, the Nazi had thrown at us everything he had. But it was not enough. The losses he had suffered went

a long way toward weakening him for the next and last round—the Battle for Germany itself.

We spent February licking our wounds. There were new men to be trained, battle lessons to be passed on, and new tanks to be processed. We all knew what we were getting ready for. The Germans had thrown their Sunday punch, now we were going to throw ours.

With March came warmer weather. The white tanks and helmets were painted olive drab again and the sides built on peeps in Marseille were finally taken off. By this time the average man in the battalion had reached the point where he almost liked schnapps and could say at least either, "Estce-que vous avez une chambre pour les soldats Americaines?" or "Haben sie ein zimmer fur die Amerikanische soldaten?" Some even knew a few phrases a bit more choice!

There were some artillery duels, the Luftwaffe came over now and then (often as not in U. S. made P47s), but nothing much happened until 0100 on March 14. From 0100 until dawn, the whole Seventh Army front was one continuous flash and roar made by the thousands of pieces of artillery that started the Battle for Germany.

The Seventh Army broke through the Maginot and Siegfried Lines and pushed on to the Rhine. The 100th Division knocked out the Maginot fortress of Bitche. With the

three medium companies attached to the three regiments of the Century Division, tanks and infantry advanced on the fortress city that had been the battalion's objective since its first day of combat. Two days later Bitche was ours. It had cost men and tanks but it was an easier prize than anyone had thought it would be. Bitche civilians were quoted as saying that there had been only a handful of German troops in the town Christmas Eve, almost three months before. The fortress might have been ours for the asking.

For five days after the fall of Bitche, the 100th and the 781st waited while the coming attack on the Siegfried Line was planned. At this time the Nazis had been shoved across the Rhine farther north from Cologne to Arnheim, and also we had a toehold at the Rem-

agen Bridgehead. While we held the right anchor of the American line, Patton's Third, on our left, began to chop up the remnants of the Wehrmacht west of the Rhine. In nine days, 100,000 prisoners were taken. The Third Division of the Seventh Army finally broke through the Siegfried Line at Zweibrücken (Deux Ponts) and we, with General Burrell's Centurymen followed through and turned due East. It was the longest day's run we had had in combat up to that time—110 miles.

Although some platoons had been in Germany before, this was the first good chance we had to see the country. Zweibrücken was a pile of smoldering ruins. In the towns beyond it, we began to see table cloths, sheets, underwear—anything that looked like a white

IN THE DRINK AT GARMISCH





THEY GOT US 5 MORE POINTS

flag—hung out the windows. But one of the most impressive things we saw were the streams of men and women moving down the roads toward France. They were French, Dutch, Belgian, Polish, Russian. They had been brought from all over Europe to work as slaves of the mighty war machine. Like slaves they wore little tags to show which was a Pole, a Russian or a Belgian. They seemed never to grow tired of telling of the three, four or five years of being pushed around by German soldiers and civilians; of not being able to go to church or the movies, or buy new clothes, or have a vacation; of four or

five years wondering where their families were; of remembering how their homes had been burned and their children murdered by the conquering Wehrmacht.

As our convoy moved across the plains of Western Germany toward the Rhine, the only tanks that fell out were those with blown bogie wheels damaged by the fast pace. By midafternoon the skyline of Ludwigshaven, the city across the Rhine from Mannheim, was visible to forward elements of the battalion. In spite of the great distance covered, no tanks were held up because of lack of oil or gas. This was to be true of later "rat

aces" too. Even though we raced far ahead of our supply dumps, Service Company's men, sometimes by driving night and day, did a fine job in keeping the companies fueled and fed.

After chasing the Germans across the Rhine, the 100th Division and the battalion waited along the west bank ready to cross and take up the chase. In the following four days, the battalion was subject to enemy artillery fire, but it was the first time in 110 consecutive days that we were out of immediate contact with the enemy. Finally, on March 31st we got the order to cross the Rhine, and through clouds of artificial fog and under an umbrella of P47s, we moved from Ludwigs-haven to Mannheim across an engineer-built ponton bridge.

On the next day, 150 miles north of Mannheim, the First and Third Armies encircled the Ruhr in what was called "the largest double-envelopment in military history." The Ruhr, one of Germany's most important industrial areas, was lost and with it 21 divisions. Everyone said, "It won't be long now."

We took a right turn at Mannheim following the Neckar River which flows into the Rhine at Mannheim toward Heidelberg. The 100th moved rapidly to the west bank of the Neckar, near Heilbronn, where the enemy decided to put up a fight. Engineers attempting to bridge the river were delayed by accu-

rate artillery fire. Undaunted, hundreds of slaves who had worked in the factories in Heilbronn, swam the river or crossed in boats, often under Nazi small arms fire.

At this time two modifications of the medium tank were used for the first time by the battalion. Headquarters Company tanks, equipped with 60 rocket tubes, each capable of launching a rocket with tremendous hitting power, moved to the high ground across the Neckar from Heilbronn and fired on targets in the city. The first and third platoons of "A" Company were given ten medium tanks equipped with collapsible canvas boats attached to the tanks. At the water's edge these were inflated and the tank engine turned a propeller that drove the tank through the water. If these tanks had been able to cross the river, they would have been able to give the infantry much needed help in cleaning out Heilbronn. Unable to climb the steep

THE SOLDIER'S FRIEND



east bank, three of them sunk. The project was abandoned and Lt. Sloggatt happily commented, "I hope that's the last damned time I get into a tank that's got a life preserver on it." On April 3, while we were fighting for Heilbronn, the battalion was given its first piece of German real estate. It was a stretch of the west bank of the Neckar from Neckargartsch to Bad Wimpfen. Headquarters and "D" Companies were made into a task force that had sole responsibility for a front of five miles of open country. To hold it with this small force, we used the rocket and assault gun platoons and had them change position frequently to fool Jerry. Patrols were run along the river by "D" Company and Recon set up flares so that we would know at once of any Nazi patrols. Lt. Yarlott and Sgt. Breglia were not surprised when the flares worked alerting our front.

While our task force guarded the river

DOC AND HIS PILL ROLLERS



bank, infantry, whose crossing had been covered by tank fire, began the job of taking Heilbronn. G-2 reports said the defense of the city was under a Nazi general who had been told to hold the city at all costs. Finally on April 8, "C" Company's three platoons got across the "Yehudi" ponton bridge. (Now you see it, now you don't!) A few minutes later it was knocked out again. They immediately teamed up with the infantry in building to building street fighting that lasted five days and five nights. German children were captured who had directed artillery fire against us while other children pointed out German tanks and defensive positions to Lt. Leber's platoon. One night two German infantrymen were killed just before they could use a panzerfaust against Sgt. Dunn's tank. They had sneaked through the streets with heavy socks over their hobnailed jack-boots. the loss of only one tank in Heilbronn was significant evidence of the coordination of our Infantry-Tank team. Our hats were off to the 100th.

On April 12th, enemy artillery was pushed out of effective range of the bridge, and "A" and "B" Companies entered Heilbronn with their regimental combat teams. Finally on the thirteenth, after 10 days of the bloodiest fighting, Heilbronn was captured. What had once been a beautiful German city with only its important railroad marshalling yards de-



NO ONE HURT THIS TIME

stroyed by Allied bombings, was a ghost city of blown up burned out buildings. As you walked down the alleys of rubble that had been streets, you could read the messages written in German chalk on the ruins of houses and apartments. The people who had lived there wrote them for friends or relatives to tell what had happened to them. "Otto: Little Albert was killed and I am with the Karlsbergs" or "The Schmidt family has moved to Sontheim. Heil Hitler!"

After crossing the Neckar, the 100th fanned out on a 27 mile front, with a large section of it held by a provisional reconnais-

sance squadron made of elements of the battalion and the division. Shortly after this, holding force had done its job, the 100th reverted to Army reserve and the battalion rejoined the 103rd Division and moved rapidly toward the Danube, which turned out to be a small river not in the least blue. The day we crossed it, April 27, the First Army linked up with Marshal Koniev's First Ukrainian Army on the Elbe.

The rapid advance continued without resistance except for handkerchief-waving German soldiers who wanted to surrender. "C" Company swung left toward Munich and took



WISHFUL THINKING

Landsberg, the city on the Neckar in whose fortress Hitler wrote *MEIN KAMPF*. But "C" Company's men visited something more important than Hitler's clink. In a court yard stacked high with emaciated corpses, they found a concentration camp. Many of the inmates were so weak with hunger they couldn't get out of their bunks. Some who were able to walk, went to a medic's peep and started to eat packages of three-inch bandages thinking they were food.

The Alps themselves were next, but before the battalion got into the really big ones, orders were received to prepare men and ve-

hicles for sub-zero weather. Anti-freeze and extra clothing were ordered but before they arrived, the battalion was on its way. On the twenty-ninth we passed through Oberam-gau, the town famous for the Passion Play depicting the life of Christ. The little village that is associated by people all over the world with the Jew from Nazareth paradoxically had a large poster on the main street complete with cartoon and an anti-semitic message.

On the thirtieth the battalion paused in Garmish-Partenkirchen, weathered a five day blizzard and eight inches of snow in May, then moved across the Austrian border toward

Innsbruck. On May 2, 900,000 Nazi soldiers in Italy and Western Austria surrendered, Berlin fell, Mussolini was killed, and Hitler was reported dead.

On the fourth, the first and second platoons of "C" Company proceeded through the Tyrolean Alps with elements of the 103rd Division. They went through the Brenner Pass, the first tanks in the history of war to do so, and made contact with the Fifth Army eight miles inside Italy. On their way to the pass, "C" Company was halted by a soldier with a red lantern at a bridge. It was a Nazi complete with potato masher grenades and burp gun. He said to Captain Kelley, "Your 32-ton tanks will be able to get across this

GOING HOME—AT LAST



60 ROUNDS IN 30 SECONDS

bridge but you'll have to drive slowly." Captain Kelley had them drive slowly. They made it okay.

Two days later, German Army Group G, facing the Third and Seventh Armies, quit and the next day, May 7th, the remaining German troops in Norway, Austria and Czechoslovakia surrendered unconditionally. It was the end. Free men could breathe again in Europe.

* * *

With the end of the war in Europe, everyone wondered if the battalion would be an occupation force or go to the CBI. At first it looked like the former. We moved down the Inn River 17 miles west of Innsbruck to the town of Telfs. It was a good life, with deer hunting, fishing, mountain climbing, baseball and other sports. A month later the War Department found our mountain retreat and we were headed for Le Havre and the CBI. The trip home on the Liberty ships



BRENNER! THE END OF THE LONG, LONG TRAIL

Leland Stanford and Alfred Moore was about as pleasant as it could be on a troop ship. At sea on the Fourth of July an awards ceremony was held aboard each ship and men who had won Silver Stars, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts received them. The ships were met in New York harbor and Hampton Roads by reception committees of WACs and bands played on the decks of welcome ships.

Probably the most important thing that

occurred on our thirty-day recuperation furloughs and leaves was done by a handful of men in the "Enola Gay." They were the crew members of the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The same bomb that vaporized steel buildings in Japan was to step up the point system and dissolve, if not the tank battalion itself, at least the old gang of the 781st at Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

Headquarters 100th Infantry Division
Office of the Commanding General
APO No. 447, Care Postmaster
New York, N. Y.

14 July 1945

Subject: 781st Tank Battalion.

To: Commanding General, United States Forces, European Theater
(Main), Frankfurt, Germany.

(THRU CHANNELS)

During a large part of the combat activities of this Division, the 781st Tank Battalion was attached to it. I consider this battalion a superior combat unit. Its conduct was such that it gained the respect and admiration of the entire Division, and I have it from the Commanding Officer of that unit that it felt the same way towards this Division. I therefore request, in the interests of the combat efficiency of this unit, that, if feasible, the 781st Tank Battalion be attached to the 100th Infantry Division for any combat operations it may be called on to conduct.

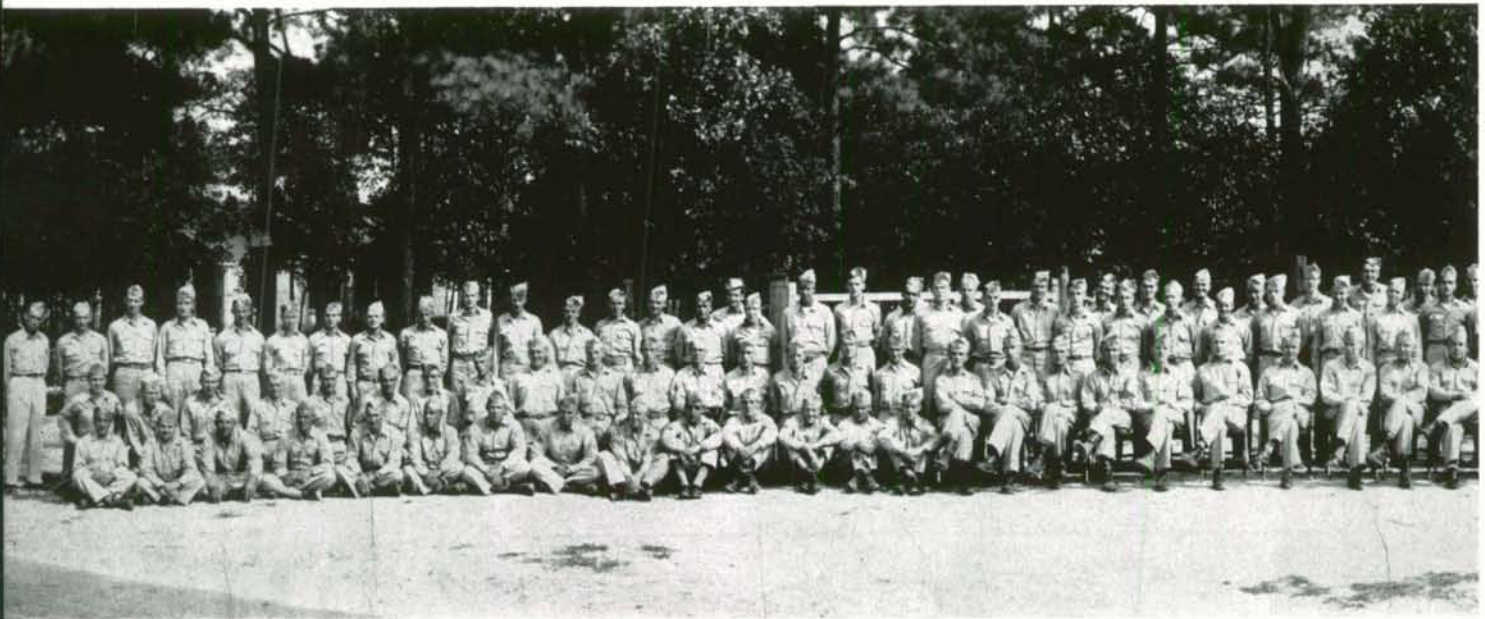
W. A. BURRESS,
Major General, U. S. Army,
Commanding.

This letter of commendation written by Maj. Gen. Burress was sent through channels to Gen. Eisenhower's headquarters.

COMBAT AWARDS TO BATTALION

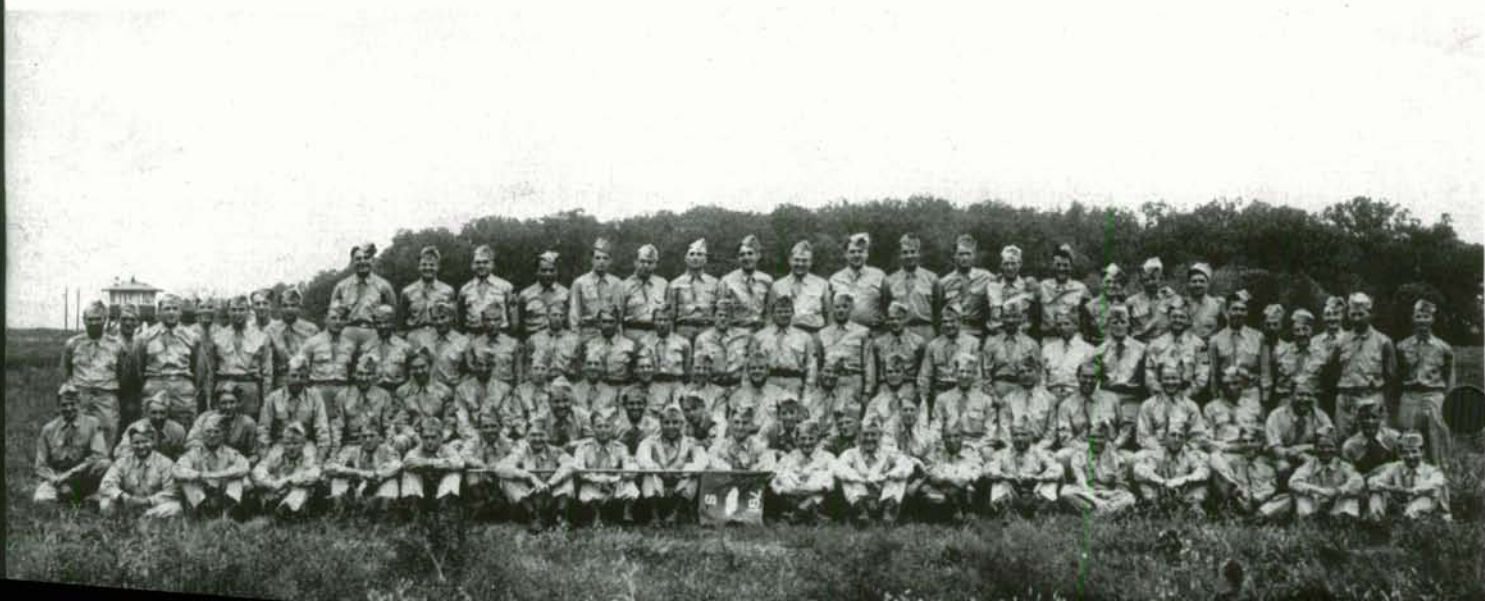
Bronze Star	152	Purple Hearts	81
Oak Leaf Cluster to Bronze Star	11	Oak Leaf Cluster to Purple Heart	6
Recommended for Bronze Star	14	Recommended for Purple Heart	17
Silver Star	9	Killed or Died of Wounds	32
Oak Leaf Cluster to Silver Star	1	Recommended for Distinguished	
Presidential Citation	30	Service Cross	1

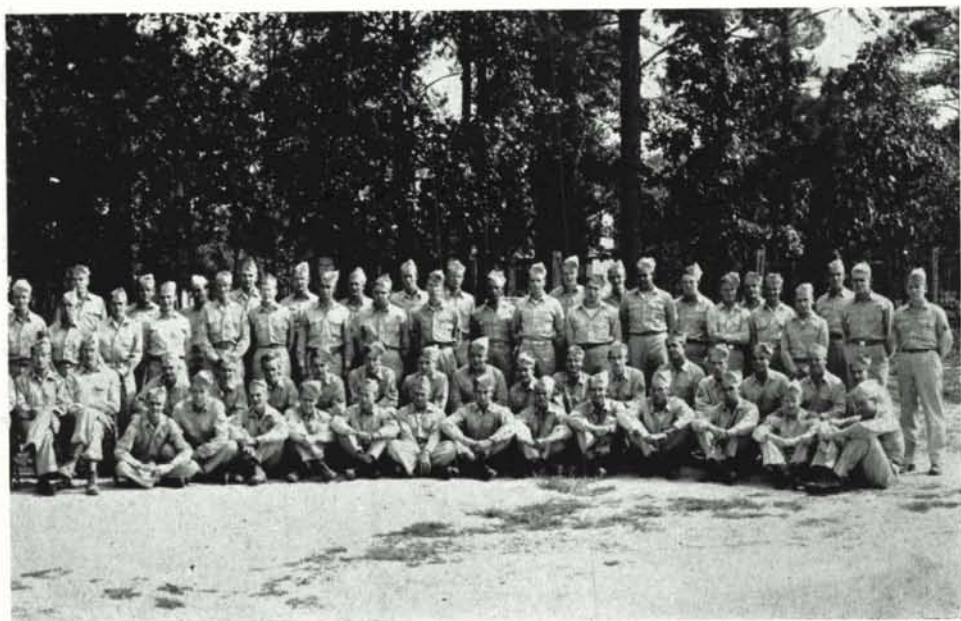
COMPANY FRONT



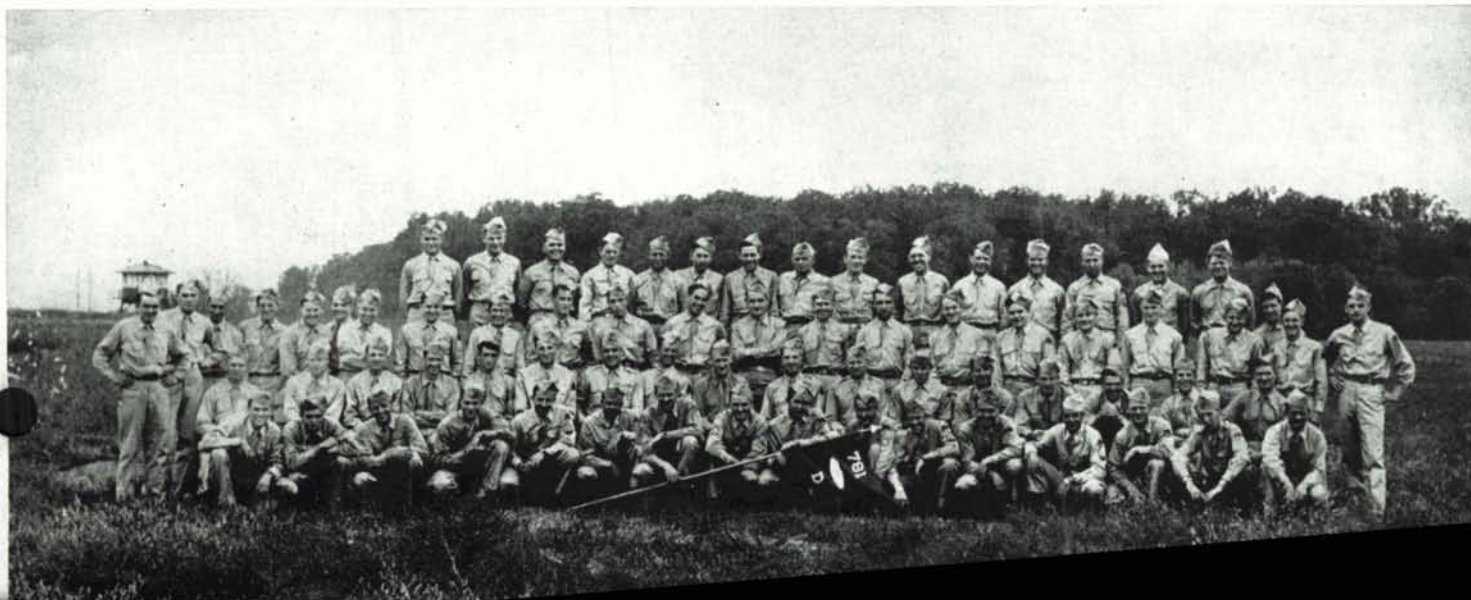
Service Company

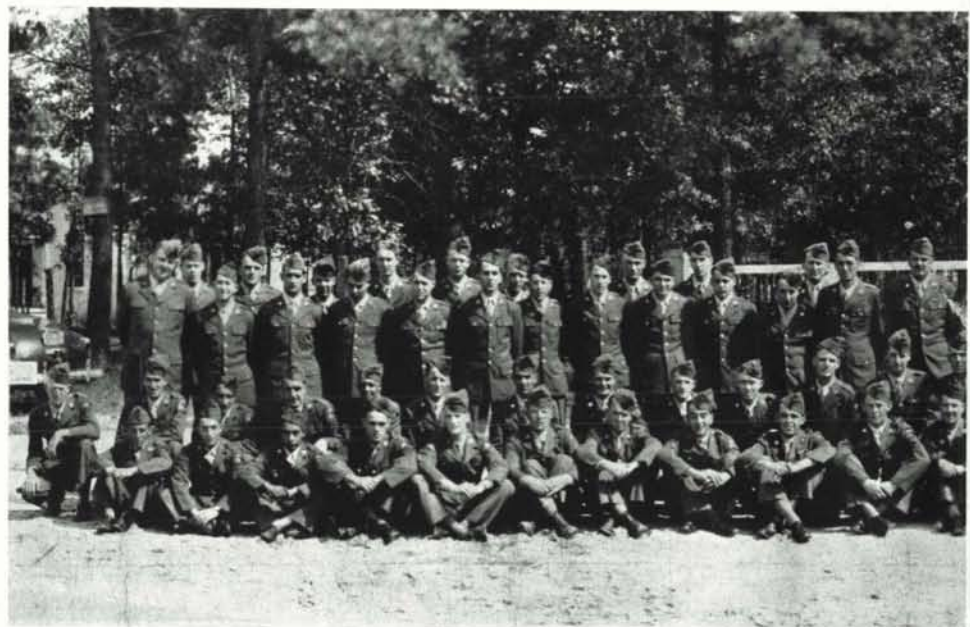
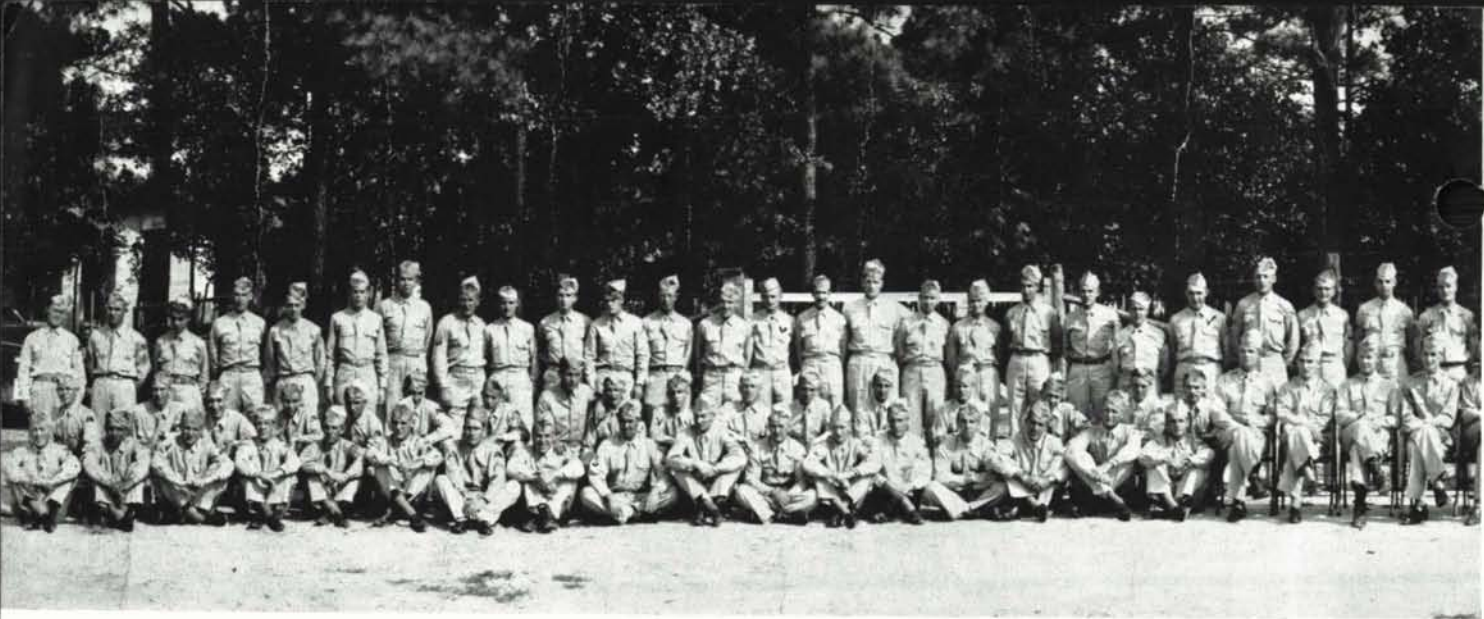
Headquarters Company





Company D



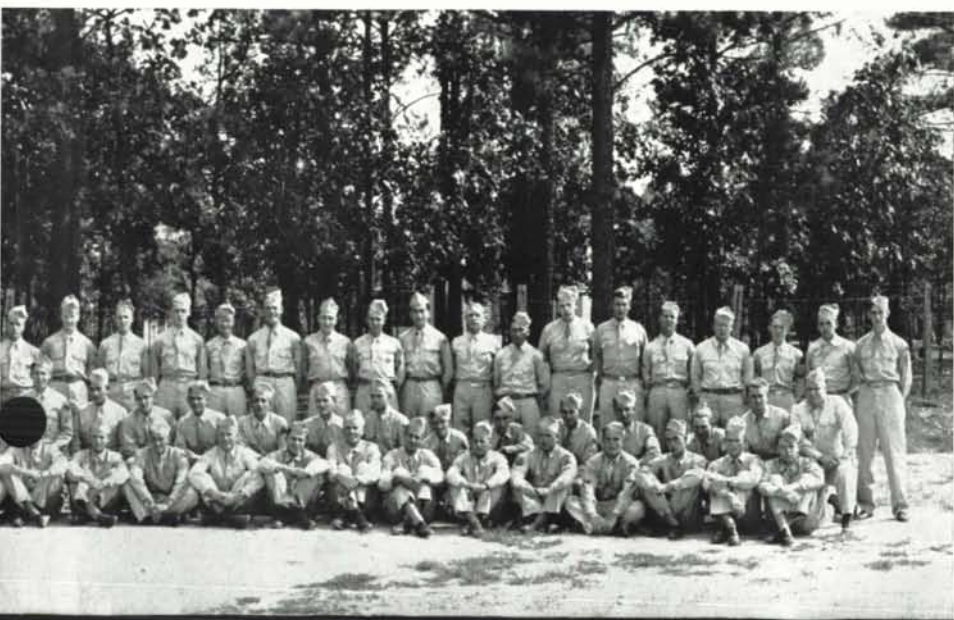


B
COMPANY





A COMPANY



C COMPANY